

# From Malice to Kindness

Ephesians 4:31 – 5:2

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## **Introduction:**

As we return to our study of Ephesians today,

- I remind you once again of the glorious calling you have in Jesus Christ if indeed you are trusting in Him for salvation.
  - The Lord of heaven has sent His only Son to die in order that all your sins might be pardoned, and has poured out His Spirit upon you so that you might be brought into His very own household!
  - You, who are worthy of nothing but condemnation have, through the grace of Jesus Christ, become a child of God...
    - He has brought you into the eternal fellowship of His house...
      - brought you in to live in the sweet communion of His love...
      - to enter into the joyful fellowship that He has had within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from all eternity!
- It is an inestimable, unspeakable privilege that staggers the mind to contemplate!
  - From condemned sinners facing a crisis eternity to the children of God, destined to live in our Heavenly Father's house, free from condemnation, free from sin!
  - What a calling is yours!
- I pray that all of you will know this salvation and will answer the call to come to God through Christ!
  - It is a call that is freely offered to all who hear the gospel...
    - It is a call to come and be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ—
      - and not just reconciled—
      - but to come and be His very own children, heirs of God, living in the joyful fellowship of His household.
        - If you have not come—if you have not answered this call—I have to wonder what it is you are waiting for?
        - What is keeping you back?
        - Our Lord says that He will by no means cast out anyone who comes to Him.
        - You can enter into the glorious fellowship of His house today if you will but come to Him and believe.

I am so thankful that many of you have come to Him—

- that through faith, you have become His children and living in the household of faith as brothers and sisters before our God and Father.
  - God is working in you as His children to shape you and fit you to live as His children ought to live.
- But as you know,
  - in His eternal wisdom,
    - our heavenly Father has not seen fit to perfect us all at once.
  - At conversion, He turned you—
    - He turned you radically—
    - He turned you from the old sinful reliance on self to reliance on Jesus Christ alone for salvation—for forgiveness and grace to live a new life...
      - You immediately set off in a whole new direction.
      - You turned with shame from what you were to live a new life by grace.

And that brings us to where we are in our study of Ephesians...

- For quite a few weeks now, we have been looking at the specific ways we are called to change after we have come to Christ.
  - We have seen how we must learn to live as God's children ought to live...
  - We must learn to walk worthy of the calling we have as heirs of His household.
  - We are no longer to walk in the futility of our minds, without direction and purpose, as if we did before we came to know God.
    - We have been taught of Christ to put off the old man to put on the new man that is created according to God in true righteousness and holiness.
    - We are to shed the old ways and to enter with joy into the new ways...
      - And who would not want to?
      - The new ways are so much better than the old!
- In Eph. 4:25, Paul speaking through the Spirit, begins to tell us about the specific changes we are to make now that we are in God's house...
  - From lying to speaking the truth...
  - From sinful anger to holy anger...
  - From stealing to hard work and generosity...
  - From rotten words to helpful words...
  - And now this week,

- we come to Eph 4:31 where we are exhorted to stop being **against** each other and start being **for** each other...
- Look at the words here—isn't that what it really boils down to?
  - Eph 4:31-32: Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.
- This is setting forth the contrast between the old way of opposition toward others that often spills over into ugly behaviours...
  - with the new way of tenderness toward others that yearns to do good for your neighbour even when he has wronged you—according to the example of Christ.

Let's look more closely at what the Lord tells you to do in this passage, if you have become His own...

## **I. First, put away every trace of ill will toward each other.**

A. Notice from the outset that the word *all* is used twice in verse 31:

- Eph 4:31: Let **all** bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with **all** malice.
- Every one of these things is to removed...
  - You are not to let one trace of these contrary attitudes and the behaviours that issue from them remain.

1. Consider how inappropriate such behaviour is...

- How inappropriate it is for you to be against your brothers and sisters for whom Christ died...
  - For you to be opposed to those He is committed to bless.
- Think about it—
  - Our dear Lord Jesus has gone to the cross for them and is working in them to sanctify them...
  - He is for them and you are against them?
    - What ingratitude!
    - What pride!
    - How unseemly it is!
- Do you not realise that if you are against the one that Christ is for, you are working in opposition to Christ?
  - You are at contrary purposes with your Lord!

- This is foolish because you cannot win against the Lord...
  - And it is wicked—that you, the one the Lord has been so patient with—should be so impatient with your brothers and sisters...
    - We will look at this more later...
2. But for now I want you simply to see that these contrary attitudes and behaviours are to be completely removed—every last trace of them...
- a. You are not to indulge them, excuse them, or give them in place in your life as a believer.
- You are to see that they are entirely eliminated.
- b. Now be careful about this...
- Those who indulge in these shameful behaviours are often very good at excusing themselves...
    - We tend to minimise what we have done...
      - I can think of times when as a parent, I have spoken in irritation rather than for the purpose of correction...
        - and when my wife pointed it out to me, my first response was to deny it:
          - “I wasn’t that angry!”
  - Sometimes, believers will even feel quite justified in opposing their brother.
    - We explain the wrong he has done...
      - How he needs to be put in his place...
      - How we have had quite enough from him...
  - Now I do not deny that there is a righteous anger, but that is not what is being spoken about here...
    - The anger in these verses is anger that arises out of bitterness and malice...
      - it is talking about those times when you have turned against your neighbour to and begun to hate him.
      - There is no justification for that!
        - Eph 4:31: Let **all** bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with **all** malice.
- c. Now of course I am not saying that you are never to be against your brother’s sin—
- 1) The truth is, if you are **for** him,
- you **will** be against his sin...
  - and you will rebuke for him for it and call him to repentance;

- and you will pray for him when he is overtaken in a fault.
  - You will do all you can to correct him to and to restore him...
    - but you will not be against him.
- 2) Moreover, you will be very much against your neighbour if he is doing what is harmful to others...
- You may have to resist him and restrain him...
    - you may have to report him to the authorities to be disciplined—
    - you may even have sentence him to punishment of some kind if you are in a position of authority.
  - If you love God’s glory and if you love your neighbour, you will also pray that he will be stopped in his destructive work...
    - It may even be your duty to hurt him—say if he is attacking someone and the only way you can stop him is by hurting him...
    - Or you may have to publish something against him if he is promoting heresy and is leading others astray.
  - But all the while you are not to take up that malicious attitude that would be grieved to see him repent!
    - There is not to be a trace of bitterness or malice or of any kind of anger or clamour that arises out of such bitterness and malice.
  - There are some excellent examples of persons who resisted evil but did not show bitterness or malice in scripture...
    - There is David who wept when his personal enemies came to harm and who prayed for them when they were in distress...
      - but who, at the same time, was jealous to uphold God’s justice as the king of Israel and did not hesitate to take up arms when necessary.
    - And of course, there is the Lord Jesus Himself who roundly denounced the error of the Jewish leaders,
      - but then prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” when they put Him on the cross.

TRANS> So be clear about this—

- You are to have zero tolerance for every vestige of bitterness and malice and for every sinful behaviour that grows out of them...
  - Not a trace of it is to be found in you.
  - This is something for every one of us to work on.

B. But just what are the vile ways that you are to eradicate from your life as they are set forth in our text?

1. First, see that you are to entirely rid yourself of bitterness...

a. The Greek word here is just like our English word—

- It refers to a sharp, unpleasant taste—
  - Have you ever chomped on an aspirin?
  - That's an example of a bitter taste.
- But as in English, this word also speaks of a bitter attitude toward another person.
  - It speaks of what one man called “a smothered displeasure”—
    - a dissatisfaction that is characterised by discontentment more than revenge.
- Another said,
  - It denotes that fretted and irritable state of mind that keeps a man in perpetual animosity—
    - that inclines him to harsh and uncharitable opinions of men and things—
    - that makes him sour, crabby, and repulsive in his general demeanour—
    - that brings a scowl over his face and infuses venom into the words of his tongue.

b. You all know about this, don't you?

1) You have seen it in others, but you also know it in yourself...

- This bitterness seems to just well up inside you, doesn't it?
- Sometimes, for no apparent reason—
  - you are just dissatisfied with life—
  - You got up on the wrong side of the bed as we say...
- Nothing is quite right for you—
  - the slightest little thing becomes a source of aggravation.
- Even if your neighbour has done nothing wrong, you take it as wrong...
  - He doesn't have to do much of anything to annoy you.
  - You are so petty, so easily irritated...

2) It is difficult for those around you...

- Your poor wife, your poor husband, your poor children—the poor people who work with you—your poor friends...
- The tender ones among them are going around troubled about what they must have done to displease you...
- They think they must have done something wrong because of the way you are treating them...
  - They don't know how to make things right, for if they try, it only makes you all the more aggravated.

TRANS> When this bitterness sets in,

- it is always just waiting to express itself outwardly toward whoever might be in its path...
    - And it finds many different ways to do that...
    - Some of those ways are presented in the list that follows...
      - Bitterness and malice are the underlying attitudes at either end of this list, and the ones in the middle are the ways that bitterness and malice are expressed.
2. The second word in the list is wrath (γῆλον in Greek)...
- a. Wrath (γῆλον) refers to an outburst of passion—
    - A flare up of anger in the heat of the moment.
    - It sometimes seems to come on without warning...
      - but very often it arises out of bitterness from those who are generally discontent...
        - from those who are ungrateful to God for His mercies...
        - from those who are full of self-pity.
  - b. Those who give themselves over to malicious wrath are sometimes very strong in one way...
    - they may be powerful sorts of persons who inspire fear in others...
    - Their display of anger may strike terror in others...
      - but in another way they are very weak because entirely lacking in self control.
  - c. This sort of uncontrolled outburst is not to characterise the believer at all...
    - I don't mean to say that there is never a proper place for speaking very strongly to those who have done wrong...
      - even as the Lord Jesus Himself did at times...
    - But it is never to be that outburst that flares up from a root of bitterness.
      - It is rather to be a firm and deliberate opposition to wrongdoing.

3. The third word in the list is anger—(οργη in Greek)
  - a. This is a more subtle fruit of bitterness—
    - If *γυμνον* speaks of “hot anger,”
      - οργη speaks of “cool anger.”
    - It is a more settled and deep-flowing sort of anger such as you have toward a person you have never reconciled with...
      - Sometimes, all you have to do is see that person and you are agitated.
      - This is the kind of anger we looked at in v. 26 that you are not to let the sun go down upon...
        - You are not to let it remain in you for any length of time.
  - b. This sort of anger expresses itself in less boisterous ways than *wrath* (*γυμνον*) which we just looked at...
    - You might say that it shows itself whenever it has opportunity...
      - When there is occasion to speak evil of your neighbour or an opportunity to put him in his place, the opportunity is taken.
    - Even though this kind of anger may remain hidden,
      - It is very destructive...
        - It hinders prayer and it keeps you from loving your neighbour the way you should.
4. Clamour and evil speaking are next on the list of forbidden behaviours...
  - a. Clamour is the expression *γυμνον* (*wrath*).
    - 1) It refers to a boisterous outcry—shouting in the face of another—
      - it is the behaviour of the hockey coach against the official when he thinks the official has made a bad call.
      - It is the behaviour of the mother who loses it with her children and starts shouting at them in a cruel and uncontrolled manner...
      - It is what is sometimes called giving someone a piece of your mind.
    - 2) One of the most striking expressions of this was that of the Jews when Pilate washed his hands during Christ’s trial, declaring that he could find no fault in him...
      - There followed that clamorous and uncontrolled outburst of shouting: “Crucify Him, Crucify Him!”



- The same sort of thing was done to Stephen, the first Christian martyr when he had exposed the wickedness of his detractors by words of wisdom,
    - Acts 7:57: “Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;”
  - 3) This sort of outcry has nothing to do with solving problems or correcting wrongs—it has no place in a believer’s life.
    - It alienates people instead of helping them.
    - If you want to drive your children away, this is the way to do it.
  - b. Evil speaking is often the expression of *orgh* (anger), the cool and deliberate kind of anger.
    - 1) Evil speaking is actually the word *blasfhmia* from which we get the word blasphemy.
      - But it is different from our word blasphemy because we always use blasphemy to refer to speech that is injurious to God’s majesty.
      - The Greek word *blasfhmia* also refers to speech that is injurious toward your neighbour’s reputation—
        - It is reviling speech that denounces your neighbour...
        - It is calling him a fool, slandering him, trying to ruin his good reputation.
    - 2) Many times these words are the result of a lot of meditation—
      - In anger, you are looking for faults in your brother and then you bring up all that you have found—
        - complete with embellishments and exaggerations and uncharitable interpretations of everything he has done...
        - If he went to help his neighbour, he was neglecting his family;
          - if he stayed home to look after his family, he cares nothing for his neighbour.
- C. You are to put all of these attitudes and behaviours completely away from you...
1. They are to be entirely swept out of your life together with all malice...
    - Malice is the last on the list...
  2. Malice, like bitterness, is at the root of them all...
    - It is the poison in them that makes them wicked and unacceptable and contrary to God’s will...
    - Malice is what you might call ill-will or bad-heatedness.

- It is that wicked disposition of mind that takes delight in inflicting hurt or injury on your neighbour.
  - I mean that you actually desire to see another person hurt.
3. It's hard to admit it, but there is something of this in every one of us...
- a. Can any of you say that you have never desired to see your neighbour injured?
    - Can any of you say that you never tried to injure your parents?
      - that you have never tried to lower your neighbour's reputation?
      - that you have never sought to take revenge on your neighbour, and that at times you have even done it for no apparent reason?
      - that you have ever been sad to see another person blessed?
  - b. All this is because there is malice in you...
    - that ill-will,
      - that desire to see others harmed.
  - c. It is a very shameful thing—it surely is—it is embarrassing to admit it...
    - but I remind you that when God's Spirit is at work in you, He uses His word to lay bare the sin that is in your heart...
      - to show you the vileness of it that He might lead you to repentance.
      - Do no resist Him.
    - If there were no forgiveness...
      - If there were no crucified Saviour who is ready to cleanse you from all your unrighteousness...
      - If there were no promise of the Spirit to work in you and change you...
        - then I would tell you to resist the convicting work of the Spirit—to hide you sin as well as you can...
    - But there is forgiveness and there is the promise of a new life—
      - The Physician is here and He can cure all!
      - Don't try to hide from Him...
        - Welcome His diagnostic work—let Him find all that is wrong with you—even the deepest darkest most shameful things...
          - Let Him reveal them all so that you can get on with the cure.

TRANS> Oh brothers and sisters—

- What a beautiful replacement there is for bitterness and malice...
  - Let the light of God search into all the corners and secret places of your heart...

- Let Him it expose everything vile and evil so you can replace it with something far better...

## **II. In verse 32, you are called to replace it with good will.**

A. First of all, it says to be kind toward one another...

1. Instead that bitterness and malice...

- Instead of all that harsh speaking and yelling...
- Instead of those hurtful words...
  - There is to be kindness.
- There is a beautiful simplicity here...
  - Knock off all that malicious behaviour and be kind!
  - You all know what that means!

2. In Luke 6:35, Jesus reminds us that God is kind, even to the evil and ungrateful.

a. It is His disposition to bestow good things upon His creatures...

- Just look at how He created the world!
  - He built into it a thousand things for no purpose but to make our hearts glad...
  - There is beauty, there is colour, there are thousands of different kinds of food, there are textures, there is sexual love, there is companionship, there is a marvellous and interesting universe to explore.
  - And best of all, He made us in His own image so that we might live in love patterned after His love,
    - and that we might know Him and behold His glory with understanding—seeing and delighting in His beauty.

b. You say, “Yes, but He made us subject to fall—and now that we are fallen, He has brought His curse upon us...”

- “Now there is death and hell and sorrow and sin and hostility...
  - “This is not so kind...”
- But my friends,
  - Don’t you see—all that is because of our corruption of God’s good creation.
  - He made us with the ability to continue or to turn and we turned.
    - We ruined what was good and excellent and the Lord is dealing with us according to our demerit in cursing us and sentencing us to eternal misery.

- But even in this, His kindness shines all the more!
    - It shines forth in the redemption of sins!
      - He comes to us in His grace—as the first three chapters of Ephesians explains with such glorious words—
        - to restore His elect—
        - to call them from the darkness and restore life in them again...
        - to bring them nearer than they were even at creation before the fall—
        - to make them His very own sons and daughters who will live in His house forever.
  - And all this He does even though it costs Him greatly—
    - Even though it could not be done apart from the sacrifice of His own Son...
      - In Christ, there is a new creation, and I tell you,
        - the glory of this new creation far surpasses the glory of the first creation!
      - The kindness displayed in restoring ungrateful ruined sinners so far surpasses the kindness shown to us at the first that it makes that former kindness as nothing...
        - even though considered in itself, the former kindness is far from nothing!
          - It is wonderfully great—
            - but the restoring kindness is far greater still.
3. Brothers and sisters, you who believe, you have been restored and taken into God's own house!
- a. Your Father has been so kind to you and now, having restored you, He is simply calling you to be kind!
    - There is nothing hard about it!
    - You are to (as it says in chapter 5) imitate your heavenly Father...
      - As His children, you are to live in His house as He does...
      - As His children, you are to love each other.
      - You are to be as dear children—endearing yourself to your father.
  - b. He goes on to explain in verse 2 that you are to love as Jesus has loved us...
    - 1) Jesus gave Himself to meet our need...

- He made Himself a bloody sacrificial offering of atonement to take away all our sins...
  - He did what it took to bring good to us—even when what it took was the offering up of Himself on the cross!
- 2) You see what the Father thinks of this...
- To Him it is a sweet-smelling aroma!
    - The love of His Son for us was pleasing to Him!
    - The sacrifice He made was sufficient to cover all our sins!
    - It was the exchange of His life for ours!
      - He bore the curse so that we might be forgiven and so be restored to God's house forever!
- 3) What a house where there is such love!
- What a house where the Father delights in such kindness!
  - This is the house you have been brought into!
  - And the Father wants all of you to live constantly in this same love for each another!
- c. This means that you are to be always looking for ways to be kind as Jesus was kind...
- You are to look for what you can do for your brothers and sisters even as Christ looked to see what He could do for you and for them!
  - Granted, you cannot do as much as Jesus did, but you can do something!
  - And what a house it will be when we have learned this—
    - When all of us start following the example of Christ!
    - When all of us imitate our Father's kindness!
      - What a delightful household it will be!
      - Every member will be ready to lay down His life for the good of every other!
        - No more malice, no more ill-will, no more clamour and evil speaking, no more bitterness and wrath and anger.
        - We are to be **for** each other instead of **against** each other...
          - You are to be kind!

B. With kindness is mentioned tender-heartedness...

1. Tender-heartedness conveys two ideas...

- a. First, that you are to be concerned about your brother's miseries.
  - In our fallen condition, we are often unmoved by the sorrows of others...
    - and when we are moved, it is often more because of anger toward God than real concern for our neighbour.
  
- b. Secondly, that you to be moved and inclined to bring relief to your neighbour's miseries.
  - If you are really tender-hearted, you will be moved into action...
    - Your feelings of compassion will translate into acts of compassion and mercy...
      - they will translate into kindness.
  
  - And let me add that tender-heartedness will not only take an interest in relieving miseries,
    - It will also take pleasure in bestowing blessings—even when there is not particular misery to relieve.
    - It will be constantly looking for ways to do good.
      - It will, as Jesus said of the woman who anointed His feet, do whatever it can.
  
- 2. You see, tender-heartedness is the root out of which kindness flows.
  - a. The Lord Jesus did not exchange the glories of heaven for the cross apart from a deep deep love that He had for us...a true tender-heatedness...
    - The Triune God did what He did because He loved the world so much...
      - He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.
      - The kindness was born out of tender-heartedness toward us.
  
  - b. Tender-heartedness is so opposite to that malice that so often expresses itself in anger and wrath on our part!
    - The superiority of it cannot be denied!
      - Is there anyone that would honestly say that this is not far better?
      - Would you not all desire to have everyone in the world looking to do good for you instead of harm?
        - That is what you are called to here...
          - So why is there any resistance to this?
          - Why would we not whole-heartedly imitate our heavenly Father as dear children?
  
    - As Paul says in Corinthians, "Love is the more excellent way."

TRANS> But if you are going to be kind and tender-hearted toward others, something else is needed...

C. To live in this new way there must be forgiveness.

- As it says at the end of verse 32...you are to be
  - “Forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you.”
  
- 1. The word translated **forgiving** that is used here (*carizomai*) is not the word that is usually used for forgiveness.
  - *carizomai* is closely related to the word *cariv* which means grace
    - It stresses the idea of giving freely...or forgiving freely...
    - It has to do with giving when you do not receive anything in return.
    - For example, it is used in Romans 8:32 where it says of God:
      - Ro 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also **freely give** us all things?
  
- 2. In the context of our passage, this seems to refer to our call to be all out for the good of others regardless of what they may have done to us!
  - a. Rather than taking our stand against them,
    - we are to be going all out to do them good—
      - to be kind to them—
      - to do what will benefit them...
  
  - b. In other words, your kindness is supposed to flow out of free grace the same way God’s kindness flows out of His free grace...
    - It is to issue forth even when your neighbour has done what deserves the very opposite of kindness to you...
      - As we did to the Lord!
  
    - Remember that all our sin—
      - original sin, personal sin in the past and personal sin in the present—
      - is all directed against Him...
        - and despite all that,
          - still He sent His Son to redeem us!
            - He did it freely—
            - He did it graciously—
            - He did it even though we deserved the opposite...

- c. And here we are offended with our brothers and sisters for the slightest irritations—
  - even when they have done no real wrong to us...
    - we are there harbouring ill-will toward them just because we are having a bad day—or lashing out at them...
  - Do you see?
    - This is saying that far from that sort of pettiness,
      - you are to be ready to show kindness to them and to have good will toward them even when they have deeply wronged you!
  - Have you heard the parable that Jesus told about the great debt and the small debt?
    - A king had a servant who owed him something like 6 billion dollars—and the king heard his pleading and forgave him his debt...
      - but then when the servant went out and found his fellow servant who owed him about \$10,000, he refused to forgive him and had him cast into prison.
      - \$10,000 is a lot of money—but it is nothing compared to the debt you owe to the Lord—and that He has forgiven you if you are in Christ!
        - So by what principle is it that you take it upon yourself to refuse to forgive your brother when Christ has forgive you for something far greater?

### 3. Brothers and sisters,

- Maybe one of the reasons the Lord has left us in this fallen world for a time is so that we can learn to love others even when we are wronged!
- We will not have the opportunity to do that when we get to heaven because everyone will be loving us as we are loving them...
- But all the while that we are there enjoying that glorious fellowship,
  - we will be bowing before the Lord Jesus and our Father who loved us when we were so unlovely...
  - and we will know what a deep deep love that is from our feeble efforts here to imitate it.

### **Conclusion:**

This is the love that your gracious Father has for you!

- This is the love that He calls you to live in right now!



- This is the love that He is working in you as you work out your salvation with fear and trembling!
  - Away with all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking together with all malice...
  - These have no place in you Christian!
  - You are child of God!
    - Imitate Him as dear children.
    - Walk in love as Christ has loved you and given Himself for you, an offering and sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.
  - Delight your Father by imitating His love.